

DESCRIPTION

COLLECTING METHOD BY INFORMATION PROCESSOR,
AND ORDERING METHOD OR SALE METHOD

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Technical Field

The present invention relates to a collection method, ordering method, sales method or sales system, information processing apparatus, collection method or sales method using information processing apparatus, and program and medium therefor. For example, it relates to ordering, sales, and collection of office consumables such as toner cartridges.

15 Background Art

Printers, copiers, and facsimile machines using electrophotography are essential tools in conducting business. These electrophotography-based machines need consumables such as toner. If they run out of consumables and are not replenished quickly, they will be rendered unusable. To avoid such situations, offices maintain proper inventory of consumables. Recently, there have been companies that create a post called an IMS (Information Manager of Systems) to maintain proper inventory of consumables on a company-wide basis.

Some electrophotography-based machines are supplied with toner by means of a cartridge called a toner cartridge.

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Each machine should be fitted with a toner cartridge according to its type. Printers generally require different toner cartridges if they differ in type although they are all printers. Therefore, offices and business 5 places which use many types of machine must keep many types of toner cartridge in stock. Proper inventory levels must be maintained not only for toner cartridges, but also for all the office goods used in offices and business places. Hereinafter, commodities such as toner cartridges may be 10 referred to as "office consumables." In addition to toner cartridges, office consumables include copier toners, photoconductive drums, ink-jet printer ink, other service parts, paper, OHP sheets, etc.

Toner cartridges themselves are made of recyclable 15 materials. In addition to containing toner, toner cartridges may be equipped with a mechanism for supplying toner to electrostatic latent images on the photoconductive drum or they may contain the photoconductive drum itself. Thus, in order to recycle such materials and parts, it is 20 desirable that used toner cartridges be collected efficiently.

There are certain demands concerning the sales style, inventory control, and recycling of office consumables with such characteristics:

25 [Sales style]

With the widespread proliferation of the Internet, people wish to use an Internet in sales and ordering of

office consumables. Although there are already systems that sell goods using the Internet, it is not easy to select and order office consumables compatible with the equipment used, from among a great variety of goods. Besides, the 5 prices of goods listed by such sales systems do not deal with each customer individually.

[Inventory control]

Manufacturers and stores which supply and sell office consumables according to the equipment used carry 10 considerably large inventories of office consumables in their warehouses out of the necessity to provide office consumables to customers in a short period. However, due to a great variety of office consumables and difficulty of demand forecasting, it cannot be said that proper inventory 15 is maintained. Consequently, there are cases in which office consumables ordered by customers are out of stock while geographically distant stores carry excessive inventory. In such cases, although it is possible to supply the customers the office consumables from stores with 20 excessive inventory, it is quite impossible to deliver them in a short period because the customers are located outside normal delivery areas. Thus, there is demand for inventory control which takes into consideration the great variety of office consumables and difficulty of demand forecasting.

25 [Recycling]

In order to collect and recycle toner cartridges effectively, it is desirable that manufacturers and